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LIBRARY SCIENCE

THE “ASSISTANT LIBRARIAN”

FORMERLY “THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT”

OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE A.A.L.

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AUGUST

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THE ASSISTANT LIBRARIAN

Official Journal of the Association of Assistant Librarians

(*Section of the Library Association*)

Edited by W. G. Smith, Finsbury Public Libraries

VOL. 49. NO. 8.

AUGUST, 1956

The Chance to Read

—*a review by Eric Moon*

Thirteen years after, the second McColvin report has arrived. The coverage (international) and the intended audience (general public) are wider, but the purpose fundamentally the same "of encouraging the development of public libraries throughout the world . . . I hope to show that the best public libraries are not good enough, and thus how bad are the worst."

The Chance to Read (Phoenix House, 1956, 35s.) is a survey of public libraries in the world to-day, though with certain expressed limitations, much of the Far East, Middle East and Iron Curtain territory remaining uncovered. Even Mr. McColvin has not been everywhere and read everything, but this book reveals him as still a model student of librarianship, allying wide background reading with an insatiable desire to see for himself.

No book could possibly be more uneven. Facts and opinions jostle for pre-eminence on every page, a good logical case will have for neighbour a completely unqualified (and sometimes, unjustified) assertion, an elaborate bouquet be followed rapidly by a particularly jagged brickbat. The coverage is uneven, and this might have been expected, but Mr. McColvin will surely receive no haggis next January for his page-and-a-half on Scotland and his mere footnote mention of the Scottish Libraries Act. More uneven than anything else is the writing itself. Much of it is dull, full of professional jargon, mundane and wordy as the average L.A. memorandum, drowned in a sea of statistics which will mean little to the public the author wishes to reach, but every so often Mr. McColvin is moved by humanity, sincerity or anger (and most often it is the latter) to a lyricism he does not normally seem to possess, and then the words fairly crackle on the page. It is all these things because it is a personal book and a dedicated one, and sometimes too a biased book, but above all it is a damned good book and an important one. No librarian or assistant should forgo the chance to read it.

One would expect the repetition of Mr. McColvin's case for larger units of library service and state grants. It occurs, to put it mildly, with some regularity, but the case is stated fairly, being shown to its best advantage in the chapter on Sweden and perhaps in its worst light in the brief passage on Scotland. One would expect a reaffirmation of Mr. McColvin's belief in open access and the free use of libraries, without charges and without restriction. That is in the book, too, but there are plenty of other opinions, and not all of them will be popular.

Students should comb this book very thoroughly. For the examiner partial to the *Discuss* or *Comment* type of question, it is likely to be a goldmine for at least the next half-dozen papers. Cut your teeth on these for a start:

"The staff play a much more important part in reference libraries than in the lending departments" (only the Reference and Special Libraries Section would agree with this).

"Most towns of 40,000 population and over . . . need at least one branch" (How now, Mr. Gardner?).

"It is often said that the library board is responsible for deciding on policy and that it is the librarian's duty to put that policy into operation. I (Mr. McColvin) do not agree." (Who does, but how many Chiefs have the guts to tell their committees so?).

Among the bouquets I should perhaps mention two. "The finest public library system in the world to-day is to be found neither in the United States nor in Great Britain, but in Sweden and Denmark." It is difficult to tie this up with a later statement that of 919 commune libraries in Sweden, only about 100 employ full-time professional staff, and that elsewhere there are part-time or voluntary librarians. A whole series of bouquets is thrown at Manchester, e.g., "The first effective public library service (in England) . . . which set the pattern for future development throughout the country." And later—"Manchester is outstanding in Great Britain." I wonder if there will be general agreement in Liverpool, Birmingham, Leeds, Glasgow and Sheffield?

The best of many good things in this book is the final chapter of "Conclusions," which houses a large percentage of the brickbats mentioned earlier. Among them is Mr. McColvin's reference to civil servants, teachers, business and professional men, university professors, Members of Parliament, members of local authorities, trade union officials as being "those who know little about (public libraries) and care less." Later, mentioning obstacles to progress for which the library profession itself must be held responsible, he says, "One of these is failure, on the part of those librarians working in scholarly and specialized libraries, to recognise the true function of the public library and to support the movement actively. . . . The other 'librarian-created' obstacle is quite frankly inefficient librarianship."

One inaccuracy I would draw attention to—"Thus all the Metropolitan Borough libraries will lend to one another's borrowers." Mr. McColvin has overlooked the ex-League champions. And the only misprint I discovered in the whole book appears on the last page of the bibliography, where the author of a certain report on Library Co-operation is listed as R. F. Vollam. Is there no co-operation at Westminster?

The book is well-produced, but at 35s., even by present-day standards, it should be. Despite the price, every library should buy copies for the staff and the lending departments. Certainly small authorities should try to afford *The Chance to Read*.

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Keesing's **Contemporary Archives** celebrated its silver jubilee last month, having first been published in July, 1931. Evidence of its usefulness is that only one independent authority of over 50,000 population does not subscribe to it (we wonder which one and why?).

Examining the Examiners

Our May issue contained an indictment of our examiners in Registration English Literature. Further evidence is now produced by

Joan M. Cooper

Before taking the examination I prepared an analysis of the questions of the past five years with surprising results. Judging from the frequency with which questions occurred on certain people, I was forced to conclude that in the examiners' opinion Thomas Hobbes is the most important figure in English literature after Shakespeare. Many completely minor writers like Abraham Cowley, Jeremy Taylor and William Collins were also pretty high on the popularity poll, while Wordsworth was mentioned once in five years and Milton twice. Hobbes appeared for the fourth time in five years last December, but I still refused to answer a question on him, having chosen English literature and not Political Science (I wonder if the examiners have got the two subjects mixed?).

One concludes from this preoccupation with minor writers and the exclusion of the great that we are expected to be specialists and to have wandered down the bypaths of English literature, but with 600 years to cover and only 6 out of 10 questions for choice, who can afford to specialise? Moreover we are practically forbidden to read the texts (that would be disconcerting) and those who try would only fail their other examinations.

Perhaps on the other hand, we are expected to know our Chaucer, Milton, Shakespeare and Wordsworth so well, that we need not be questioned on them. Oddly enough from this great quartet, the only one to appear with any regularity is Chaucer, and I imagine that it is fairly safe to say about 80 per cent. of the candidates know no more Chaucer than they may have seen reproduced in the Kelmscott Chaucer in the Bibliography textbook.

Moreover the questions themselves range from the pretentiously worded ones like that quoted on Defoe, Steele and Addison, to the irritating type "write notes (150 words) on . . .". The problem is to understand the first kind and then write in half-an-hour what could easily grace a degree paper, or alternatively to pack into 150 words information on someone who might have been a special study.

What is the examiners' aim in setting the paper? Is it in the hope that library students may cast a short farewell glance to culture before the waters close over their heads, or is it so that we should fill our heads with names, titles and dates, to look reasonably alert and be able to explain that *Moll Flanders* is much better than *Forever Amber*, and that it may be borrowed with great respectability from the 820 shelves. (I do hope no one in Swindon reads this). If facts only are wanted, then a gigantic quiz would have been much more fun to set, do and mark, and be more in keeping with the needs of a generation reared on TV and Brains Trusts.

But everything may be altered now! It may have become an advantage and not a hindrance to have read some of the texts and with a shorter period to study, the candidates may be able to specialise on his particular interests and not feel that he daren't leave anyone out since no distinction is drawn between Giants and Pygmies. In fact it may become an examination in which understanding, appreciation and knowledge are encouraged rather than forcing the candidate through a phantasmagoria of Eng. Lit. which can only bring ridicule to a profession expected to know something of books and of English books into the bargain.

Display Discussion—2

Sheffield

USE YOUR CITY LIBRARIES was the caption for a display in a large Sheffield factory canteen for a week last year. The City Librarian has kindly loaned us the photograph reproduced opposite and is willing to risk the judgment of our team of display experts. This time, John Wakeman, of Dagenham, and E. E. Ferry, of Derbyshire, are joined by Robert Walker, of Lanarkshire, whose article in the L.A. Record in January on display work make such a welcome change in that journal to the endless series of historical meanderings.

The display was arranged by placing two canteen tables together and covering them with royal blue paper. A roll of white doric board was used as a background, rounded to give a pillar effect at the front corners. This allowed the tables to be placed as an attractive unit anywhere in the canteen. Actually it ended up against a derelict cooking range, the hood of which can be seen in the photograph.

The tables were aproned with grey corrugated board, and the borders were in royal blue paper with bright yellow lettering. The centre panel was lettered in yellow on royal blue card and the four subsidiary panels were lettered in royal blue on yellow card. The books were arranged on simple hardboard stands especially designed in tiers in the corners. About 100 new and attractive books in the four groups were displayed, and users of the canteen were encouraged to handle them freely. The Welfare Officer of the factory undertook to keep the exhibition neatly arranged as near as possible to the original pattern, and members of the library staff paid visits during the week.

Copies of a printed guide to the library service and duplicated book-lists were available for taking away, together with a supply of registration forms. During the week the canteen was used by some 4,000 employees.

Our team commented as follows:—

John Wakeman—Bob's Your Uncle

An hour's examination in a damp train on a bad-tempered morning discovered nothing but virtue in the display. The chosen theme is perfectly appropriate to the occasion, covering a wide range of books at a popular level, and the execution is almost faultless. It occurs to me that the professional look in display work is to an important extent achieved by attention to details; that careful presentation is more essential to success than clever ideas. If this is true, we need only remember what they taught us in school art classes about being neat and tidy, and keeping things simple, and Bob is well on the way to being our uncle.

Bob is certainly the Sheffield display man's uncle. Here are some excellent things done with cheap materials. I like the variety in levels achieved by the harboard stands, and the much rarer variety in textures (card, Doric and corrugated board). Royal blue and yellow are striking in combination; the lettering is clear and elegant; it's a relief to see sign cards in a shape other than rectangular, and a bigger one to see book-jackets on books instead of walls.

Sheffield are to be congratulated on the idea of placing the display where some of the missing 75 per cent. could see it. It would be interesting to know what effect, in terms of new members, the project had.

Robert Walker—Read Macbeth

Sheffield should re-read *Macbeth* and learn to do one thing at a time. The first point is that there are too many books, the impact and

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the pictorial effect of each being submerged by its neighbour. They straggle over the table, rearing painfully into end-mounds, without grace or form. Fewer books, a conscious attempt to create formal piles, and the use of two bold pictorial motifs at either end, would have greatly improved the appearance. The library publicity, which was included in this exhibition, might have been prominent in such an array.

Other small points which might be mentioned are—the absence of ornamentation on the table-front overlap, the value of eye-catching points beneath the table level, and the difficulty of achieving impact with Roman lettering. I don't know whether the use of the hood of the cooking-range in the background was purely fortuitous, or not, but it was certainly successful. The colour scheme of blue, yellow, and grey, is an admirable one.

I cannot agree with Mr. Wakeman in his contention that displaying book jackets without books inside is a bad thing. In some cases it is the only thing to do, and here a better plan would have been some small bookcases, with linking display panels, on which book jackets could have been used. Unfortunately the makers of library shelving, and display units, seem to be about 50 years behind the times.

Might I conclude by again congratulating Sheffield on an interesting and very worthwhile enterprise. Next time I advise a preliminary perusal of Murrills', *Display of Canned, Packed, and Bottled Goods*. The unpromising title hides a wealth of information on display assembly.

E. E. Ferry—Full Marks

A well thought out display, enhanced by attractive panels which, if not done professionally, certainly look as if they are. Their message is simply and clearly stated—no fuss. I feel that the panels are the most important feature of this display in that they allow a cheap and unpretentious group of materials to be used for the rest of the unit. One of the chief merits about this type of display is the fact that it is easily

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transportable and can be set up wherever tables and space are available. Under such circumstances, the results can be very effective.

Perhaps one point of criticism may be allowed. As a whole, the grouping of books is effective, but a clearer break between each group would be an improvement. This is particularly so in the "hobby" and "home" group, where the casual visitor (and there must have been many) could be excused for not noticing the break in subjects. A clear distinction would add punch.

Apart from this minor point, full marks to Sheffield for a display which, like Ezra Read's piano arrangements, is simple and effective.

Your Letters

- Small Libraries — National Officers*
- Institutions — Handwriting*
- Part-Timers — Reference Libraries*

Hay, There !

In February, Mr. N. Burgess, of Lancashire County, criticised the attitude of some librarians to the L.A. proposals for ensuring adequately sized library authorities.

Mr. Burgess has been a member of the L.A. since 1948; had he had two years more service and been a conscientious reader of the L.A.R., he would have known that at the 1946 Conference the L.A. Council was instructed to bring forward no more suggestions about local government boundaries without prior consultation with the local authorities. The lesson of that Conference was obvious—local authorities react quickly to anything which affects or affronts their civic dignity. Yet, within the space of nine years the L.A. Council had contrived to forget that instruction and the lesson of 1946.

Before the memorandum was published, no attempt was made to ascertain the opinion of institutional members or of the local authority associations. On a subject which the Council knew was certain to be controversial, this was tactless, to say the least. But its subsequent behaviour was even more inept. The memorandum was adopted in May, but not made public until late August, when most local authorities had gone into recess. Why such a dilatory and awkward method as the use of the L.A.R. for the publication of a document of vital interest to all members of local authorities was adopted, has not yet been made clear.

The results were seen at the A.G.M., where the memorandum was rejected by the *united* local authority vote, not by the machinations of the smaller authorities. It was a grave error of judgment on the part of whoever was responsible to force the issue to a ballot, as the Association is now saddled with an official policy which it cannot hope to implement. However, as the Memorandum has stimulated us to examine our standards of service afresh, it has served a useful purpose, and as more will be heard about it at the next A.G.M., we can but wait and see what happens then.

DANIEL HAY, *Borough Librarian, Whitehaven.*

Since the A.A.L. Council decided to support the L.A. Council Memorandum at Southport, I feel that Mr. Hay's letter should not go unanswered in our official journal.

A great deal has been made of a postal ballot used to carry through impor-

tant proposals on the unconsidered votes of unqualified assistants. One can only compare the breadth of vision and maturity of the views expressed by Mr. Burgess (assistant) with some of the squalid squawks emitted in the pages of the *Bookseller* and elsewhere by Chief Librarians.

Mr. Hay expresses a fairly general misunderstanding of the purpose of the Memorandum when he says "the Association is saddled with an official policy which it cannot hope to implement." The L.A. Council is not so foolish as to think that it can implement proposals, but it was aware that the government was thinking of local government reorganisation and presumably considered that it might be consulted by the appropriate Ministry. Do Mr. Hay and his happy band consider that the profession and the country's library service would have been better served if the L.A. had had no opinions to offer, and libraries were not considered as a serious factor in any reorganisation of the local government structure?

All this talk about the authority viewpoint is nonsense. They get ample opportunity to voice opinions to the government through their own organisations, and the A.M.C. is not slow to do so. The L.A. should be able to express a professional opinion, and I am pleased that the authority delegates' efforts to stifle this was unsuccessful. I do not understand Mr. Hay's objections to the use of the Library Association Record for announcements concerning the A.G.M. Is it so improper for a Council to place in its own journal matters to be considered by the members who receive that journal?

I thank Mr. Hay for giving us notice of further murky things to come at Folkestone. We shall be there.

ERIC MOON.

London Leadership

I was very pleased indeed to see in the Agenda for the A.G.M. this year that there was an amendment proposed for restricting the power of the G.L.D. in the affairs of our Association. I have been worried since I came to Yorkshire three years ago to see just how many of my past friends and acquaintances of the G.L.D. hold positions of importance in the Association. Examination of the lists of Officers of the A.A.L. and the Officers of the Council makes one feel that there could be a substantial saving in the cost of Council meetings, if they were merely tagged on to the monthly G.L.D. Committee meetings.

To drive the point home, I list this year's official posts and indicate the area from which the holders come:

President	Newcastle	Education and Sales	G.L.D.
Vice-President	G.L.D.	Publications	G.L.D.
Hon. Sec.	G.L.D.	Membership	G.L.D.
Hon. Treasurer	Sussex	Assistant Secretary	G.L.D.
Hon. Editor	G.L.D.		

No one surely believes that the G.L.D. is the only area with active members willing and able to take on a bit of committee work.* It is obviously the case that a G.L.D. candidate for election to Council can count on a percentage of 2,147 potential G.L.D. votes, whereas a Manchester candidate can expect the same percentage from only 660, and other candidates from even less. The result is that there is a large number of G.L.D. people on the Council and in office.

R. B. BATEMAN, *Leeds*.

*In the only election in recent years for a national officer, a provincial member defeated a Londoner. The plain fact is that there is a shortage of candidates for office. In the case of the last new appointment, Publications Officer, G.L.D. nominated Mr. New only after all other divisions had been asked, and failed, to find someone.—ED.

Hobnails and Fossils

I would like to take-up your reviewer, Mary Walton, on her account of my paper "Enquiry Technique" in *The Assistant Librarian* for April. It is true that none of the points in my paper were very new, but never before, I think, had they been brought together in this form. Before we can have the august facilities advocated by Dr. Walford and Mr. Baker, a good enquiry technique must be part of the reference service.

Miss Walton may have been luckier than I have been in her experience of reference libraries. None in which I have worked, or in which I have visited, have not lacked some small thing—be it of staff or stock or furniture—that could not have been corrected by simple means as advocated in my paper. This is not to suggest for a moment that my paper is a "blue print" for a good reference service. Rather, I would like to stress that it is the little thing—often neglected—that encourages the use of the reference department by the public. Staff offhandedness with enquirers, the use of the department as a thoroughfare by staff and friends (all wearing, it seems, hobnailed boots) are little things but important ones—neglected even by an assistant of six months' standing! In fact, there is, I think, a need for a paper on just these things. For what the text-book advocates the library too often neglects. It was on this level that I offered my paper at Stockport, believing that it might be useful to all but those librarians fossilized on the mountain of their own perfection.

PAUL CASIMIR,
Swindon Public Libraries.

I have read, with considerable interest, Miss Walton's criticisms of the papers read at the Reference and Special Libraries Section's conference last year (*Some current problems*. 1955). She raises the question of how far the research worker remains in ignorance of efforts in other countries. Naturally this is very difficult to estimate, but is certainly greater in the

sciences than in the humanities. I feel that she is much too complacent about this. The majority of the references quoted in scientific papers are in the same language as the paper. There is no doubt that a great deal of time, energy, and money is wasted by starting research projects which have already been undertaken and reported. On the same day as I read Miss Walton's review, I read an article dealing with research into the chemistry and physics of boiling water (of great importance in the nuclear physics, and which described work done in Japan in 1934 and in Australia in 1946, and in which appeared the following words: "In 1946, but apparently in ignorance of Nukiyama's work, R. C. L. Bosworth in Australia . . ." *Times*, 13th April, 1956.

I cannot see why it is beyond the collective resources of the libraries of this country to provide a greater proportion of the world's literature for their users (as recommended by the Royal Society Scientific Information Conference); agreed that any scheme for "complete coverage" will have to exclude certain categories of publications. "Certainly the public library will find it difficult to justify the provision of foreign scholarly books on a large scale," writes Miss Walton. Maybe this is true, but it must be remembered that the public libraries are only a part of the library system of this country and that it is the university and special libraries which will, in any scheme for complete coverage, be mainly responsible for providing the research worker with the foreign material which he requires.

E. ALAN BAKER,
Library, Ministry of Supply.

Beating the Queues

Mrs. M. F. Lawrence asks how we can provide adequate staffs at busy periods to give individual attention to readers who require it and still keep the queues moving. Surely the answer is to adopt the system well known to the retail trade and engage part time staff to cover peak periods.

You can't afford them? Why not

replace one full time junior assistant at each branch by three part-timers? Three people can always be deployed to greater advantage than one.

You can't get them? Oh come, where are all your female ex-junior assistants who have resigned or married and who would now welcome an opportunity to supplement the family income?

C. P. BATE,
Ramsbottom Branch,
Lancashire County Library.

Editor's Boob?

You deserve a booby prize for your comments in the May issue on the T.L.S. advertisement inviting handwritten applications for a Borough Librarian's post. It is not a question of typewriters and secretaries; handwriting is an invaluable aid to personnel selection, even though a secondary one.

MARTIN WRIGHT,
Royal Institute of British Architects.

The scorn of "Our Booby Prize" to my way of thinking shows an unfortunate lack of experience or a cer-

tain practical knowledge of the job of interviewing. Maybe these particular people for Sutton and Cheam could have been allowed to type their applications. Equally it could be that the authority knows its business and may have had previous experience of the idiotic carelessness of some applicants when applying for positions, or other things, for which one supposes they wish to be considered as suitable candidates. For instance, ink blots, scratchings out, careless alterations or bad setting out can never be any recommendation. An authority is best without people who cannot take some personal trouble to do their best for what they want. Further, if any applicant is too lazy to do his own application, he doesn't deserve much consideration anyway.

You will probably see Lambeth advertisements asking for candidates' own handwriting. It will not be that we have not heard of typewriters. It will be to give me the opportunity of discovering who has bothered sufficiently to warrant my bothering to call them for interview.

S. W. MARTIN,
Chief Librarian, Lambeth.

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Institutional Members

A group of us were recently discussing the problem which has been described variously in such terms as institutional membership and authority representation in correspondence published in the *Assistant*, and I was urged to write to you to draw attention to the necessity to distinguish between two types of institutional representation, especially in view of the possibility of some action following the deplorable exhibition at the Southport A.G.M.

Within the non-public library field each passing year brings to light more instances of small, highly specialised, libraries, usually very short of funds, and as often as not administered on a voluntary basis. Their contents add significantly to the range of Bibliothecal material available in the country, and they often prove to contain hitherto unsuspected treasures. It is possible that the staffs of these collections will never be able to become personal members of the L.A., but the libraries themselves may well be persuaded to do so as institutions.

It seems, therefore, that a distinction needs to be drawn between what I may call "authority representation" and "institutional membership." Perhaps the significant feature of the former category is that it comprises people who form part of the governing bodies of the libraries in question, people who are not members of library staffs; whatever the theory, it is in practice a wholly public library problem. The latter category comprises members of library staffs who are not personal members of the L.A., but who work in libraries which belong to the Association; whatever happens, they should continue to be allowed to participate fully in the work of the Association.

REGINALD J. HOY, *School of Oriental and African Studies.*

A.A.L. CORRESPONDENCE COURSES

REVISION COURSES, SEPTEMBER- DECEMBER, 1956.

A limited number of *Registration* and *Final* courses will be available to run from September to December. These short period courses are reserved exclusively for those students who have already sat the examination in the subjects required.

The closing date for application is 28th August, but forms for Final revision courses will be accepted up to one week after publication of the summer examinations results if this is later than 28th August. After these dates no application will be considered.

FULL LENGTH COURSES.

Applications for First Professional, Registration, and Final courses beginning autumn, 1956, must be completed and returned by 15th September. Full particulars of the courses offered are given in the current edition of the

Students' Handbook. (L.A. 3s. 6d. post free).

FORMS, FEES AND ENQUIRIES.

Forms may be obtained from the A.A.L. Hon. Education and Sales Officer, Mr. J. S. Davey, F.L.A., 49, Halstead Gardens, London, N.21, who will be pleased to answer any enquiries concerning the courses. Stamped addressed envelopes for replies would be appreciated. The fee for each course is £2 7s. 6d., plus 10s. extra to students in Africa, America, Asia and Australasia.

NOTE.

Many students in 1955 had their forms and fees returned because application was made after the closing date. Will students please make their requests for forms and information to Mr. Davey as early as possible in order to avoid disappointment.

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